

ORAL HISTORY INDEX AND SUMMARY

Interview with: Pam Dawes

Date: 22/3/15

Location: Manchester

Total duration: 57:20

Interview by Naomi Hamill and summary by Kelly-Anne Bücher:

The interview plays as one long recording.

1.	Start time	Finish time	Approximate duration	Brief description
	00.00	57:20	57:20	Pam talks about her involvement with charity Manchester Aid to Kosovo, music projects, visiting Kosovo and the Bogujevci family in particular. Pam talks about the legalities of the Kosovar refugees being in the UK.
Pen sketch	<i>Pam Dawes was born in south London but has lived in Greater Manchester for most of her life. She worked in rehabilitation before having a family and went on to be involved in children's and youth work whilst also returning to university to study theology. She became involved in Manchester Aid to Kosovo during the second week of its formation in 1999 and is a long term trustee and treasurer of the charity. Pam has always been heavily involved in MaK's arts, music and education projects and gave witness support to the Bogujevci children. She visits Kosovo regularly and is particularly involved in the development of the Manchester Peace Park, requested by the Bogujevci children in 2001 and the children's Summer Club.</i>			
Summary of interview content	<p>(00.00) Pam says that she was born in South London. She describes how she got involved with the Kosovar refugees living in Manchester in the late nineties. Her friend phoned her up and asked her to help with the humanitarian aid collections in Urmston. Five friends had been watching the news whilst sat in a pub and they felt the need to do something to help the people in Kosovo. A week after the discussion in the pub, the project had moved into an empty Co-op supermarket and donations were streaming in from all over Manchester. She says that her house was also full of donations of clothes, blankets and food and they knew that they were on track for a very big convoy to go out to the camps in Albania. She says that it went out three weeks later and by that time she came to know those involved in the collections and convoy and became friends with many of them.</p> <p>Pam says that she did not go herself on the convoy. On its departure they did a farewell fundraiser at The Trafford Centre and she with one of the men involved from the pub group made a decision to try to make an album of Manchester music for Kosovo. The charity had also already made a single CD called 'Let love live again'.</p>			

(02.30) Pam describes how she was moving into the music role very early on. She says that at first she was in a blagging role at the Co-op getting pallets, specific donations and anything else requested by one of their guys, who had flown out to the region and was feeding back information from the camps about what was needed.

Pam says that there were about forty Manchester Aid to Kosovo volunteer drivers involved in the convoy; she herself did not go. Pam states that it could have ended there but it didn't. She said that quite soon after that, aid kept coming in and going out and her friend, Veronica - who originally called her - committed about eighteen months of her life to an ongoing aid program based at Manchester Airport Freight terminal.

Pam describes how she went on to be involved in music projects and trying to get an album together.

Pam talks about how Kosovars were then evacuated to Manchester so what could have been a short term project, suddenly changed because people were here in Manchester.

(4:08) Pam says originally did not know much about the situation in Kosovo and first heard of it when she was involved in a Christian organisation, Maranatha, when Dennis, a politically conscious man working there, demonstrated frustration and a need for our government to help with the situation in Kosovo.

The convoy never actually entered Kosovo itself as it was a war zone. She describes the danger involved giving an example of a bus being accidentally hit by NATO when vehicles were mistaken for a military convoy. Pam says that the people who went over there formed strong relationships with the camp directors, such as one American man, Bob, who spent time thanking them and really emphasising that they had done the right thing: a good thing. She describes it as being a very emotional experience for the volunteers of Manchester Aid to Kosovo who came back changed, better informed about the history and of the people there and that, in turn, affected her, too.

(06.02) Pam talks about meeting the Bogujevci children - a real turning point for her - at the Blessed Thomas Holford School in connection with the fundraising album she was working on. She had heard that only six months after arriving in Manchester Kosovar children had written a poem, which she wanted to feature on the album. She says that it was put to a hip-hop beat and is one of the tracks on the album.

She describes going to the school to find twenty Kosovar children and young people crammed into a room because even though they did not really have the funding, the school wanted to help and to keep the children together so that they

could support each other in recovery. Pam describes being very moved by the children and the beautiful group of teachers, including a nun, that had been drawn together to really help with the healing process, working close together in the former medical room - the only space available.

(07.43) Pam talks about getting to know a lot of the families and the children at the school. She says that they were excited to be involved in the album and go to the Lowry centre, meet artists such as Badly Drawn Boy. She laughs as she explains that the children were really astonished to meet someone so rich and famous who to them, still looked poor and normal. She says that their expectation of famous people was different to the reality of them sometimes being gentle, lovely and not ostentatious.

(9:00) Pam describes taking some of the Kosovars up to their house in Scotland where they kept telling her that it was quite like Kosovo and asked if Manchester Aid to Kosovo might be able to make a Peace Park in their home town. They started drawing plans for it and Selatin got very excited about that as they had been really helped at their reception centre by the fact that it had a garden and a park opposite. Pam says the parks and gardens of Manchester had really helped them. His was new to them and they really felt that people back in Kosovo would benefit from something similar.

Pam talks about Manchester Aid to Kosovo then finding out more about the Mines Advisory Group, also based in Manchester, as they had heard that they were working in Kosovo, with a view to funding some of their work with some of the proceeds from the sale of the album. She talks about going out to Kosovo in 2000, at the invitation of MAG, where she saw for herself the destruction from the war.

Pam describes how at that point 60% of the houses were showing signs of being shelled and burnt. She talks about going to minefields and seeing how critical that problem was. Pam says that she also met some of the people who had come to Manchester and gone back to Kosovo quite quickly, trying to rebuild their lives.

(11.00) Pam describes her first impressions, in 2000, of Kosovo. She says that you had to fly to Skopje and then drive to Kosovo, as Prishtina airport was a military airport at the time. She describes the roads being full of pot holes and how they had to drive in zig zags to avoid them, something she will never forget. Pam describes the amount of completely destroyed towns and villages she saw and how she wondered where the people were. She talks of seeing signs of new life such as schools and hospitals that had quickly been rebuilt by countries such as Denmark and Sweden. Pam describes feeling terribly sad about the scale of the suffering and the evidence of people being both evacuated and worse still, killed.

(12.44) Pam talks about getting to know Kosovar families in Manchester who

were quite isolated. She describes children being placed in brilliant schools where huge efforts were made to help them cope and to make friends. She mentions some of the children having to spend a lot of time in and out of hospital. Pam says that after about a year, the children were no longer in the medical room at the school but fully absorbed into the main school with the other children.

Pam talks about getting to know some of the parents, in particular, two widowed men whose children had survived a massacre but were all seriously injured. She talks about discussing, with the gentlemen, the possibility of their children, who survived the massacre of their family, going to Belgrade and giving evidence against the Scorpion unit who committed the attack.

(14.17) Pam describes the massacre in Podujevë where 21 women and children were herded into a garden by a unit wearing a mixture of uniforms, who were paid and armed by the state. She says that the unit was part of the state ethnic cleansing front line. Pam states that one man had been arrested and another had fled to Canada. She tells of a court case being led by the Humanitarian Law Centre, a Serb led organisation in Belgrade, who wanted the children to go out and give evidence. Pam says it was very, very difficult as the fathers were very nervous about the children. She says that they could not give evidence themselves as they had hid and fled and so the children were the only survivors who could give evidence. Pam says that the fathers fled as often in ethnic cleansing, it is the men and boys that are killed and they didn't expect this group of women and young children to all be shot.

Pam says that she got very close to Selatin and he used to say that he wanted the paramilitaries to be tried and he wanted it to happen but he also wanted the children to be safe. She says this led to six months of looking into how they could do it. Video facilities in Manchester were offered to her but the lawyers in Belgrade said that the court was not ready for that. Pam also says that she felt the lawyer wanted the children to go. She understood why and Serbia didn't have the facilities in Belgrade then for the evidence to be heard in the UK, anyway.

(16:20) Pam describes being the link with the British Embassy in Belgrade, who also wanted the trial to happen as it was Serbia's first War Crimes trial of its own war criminals and it was an important trial. She says that they were very supportive of the fact that this was the first war crimes trial where children were giving evidence as witnesses. Generally children are not regarded as good witnesses but there was no choice as every other adult had died. She says that it was a hugely challenging project for everyone. Selatin did not want Serb police and soldiers to protect his children as they had killed his family and already shot the same children.

Pam says that Djindjic, [the Prime Minister], was assassinated the day the trial opened, which may or may not have been influenced by the trial. After that there was a special group of witnesses being protected by vetted police as they were particularly vulnerable, as the assassination of the Prime Minister as an inside job, and it was negotiated by the British Embassy and the police and these specially vetted police would look after the children along with some ethnic

Albanian police who were living and working in parts of Serbia (due to the changed borders) whom the family would consider like themselves and trustworthy.

(18.14) Pam talks about going to Serbian in 2003 with the children and their fathers, staying in safe accommodation. She says that it was difficult but that the children were extraordinary and gave very good testimony. She says that she was impressed by their honesty. She describes the British Embassy as being with them every step of the way, from the safe accommodation to the court, with a senior Embassy staff member in the car with them and a police escort making sure that the car never had to stop in traffic. They were protected.

Pam says that the honesty of the children had filtered through to the Scorpion unit and one of them turned State Witness shortly after families had left with Pam. She thinks that the children conveyed innocence and that may have led to some of them reflecting upon what they had done that day. She also considers it was strongly in their favour that the children came back to the Balkans after only a few years and gave evidence in perfect English as it challenged a lot of people's preconceptions. Pam says that one of the paramilitaries said, 'I can't live with myself. I am going to go into court and I am going to tell the court everything that happened.'

(19.55) Pam says that the court case turned into a much bigger court case and that paramilitary even managed to obtain a video of home movies which the unit watched of killings in Srebrenica, Bosnia, which were very much wanted. The Commanders had put out a call for these videos which the unit used to watch as a home movie. She says that this particular man - who had been moved by the children - had managed to find the last copy and that it was given to the Serbian government, the police and was shown on state television. She says that from the children and Selatin deciding that giving evidence it was something they ought to do, it actually turned into something massive.

(20.48) Pam talks about her various trips to Kosovo starting with in 2000 when she went with The Imperial War Museum North and the Mines Advisory Group. She says that they were looking for artefacts for the new museum in Manchester. Pam says then in 2002 she went to Kosovo with Manchester Aid to Kosovo in connection with the Peace Park. She says that they thought they were going to be offered a little patch of land and in fact they were offered 22 acres of beautiful land which became a massive project for them.

(21.36) Pam talks about the Peace Park in Kosovo. She says that when they were asked to create the Peace Park, they felt it was a great project but that most of the people involved in Manchester Aid to Kosovo, at that time, didn't know anything about parks or gardening themselves. She describes it being a strange cross over as she was also working on the fundraising music album with Badly Drawn Boy and Elbow (who were then just beginning), Mr Scruff and Doves, bands all quite big in the indie scene. She says that then she went to the Eden Project to see Elbow perform there, who had become friends at that point. Pam also knew a steward who suggested mentioning the Peace Park to the

management at the Eden project as they would be interested - which she did and it was. So she considers this a huge step forward. Pam says that she had a meeting with the Artistic Director, Sue Hill, who then drew a team together and by the end of that day Landscape Architect, Jane Knight had arranged to go to Kosovo and see the Peace Park. Pam says that it was a miracle.

She also says they went on to do further concerts at the Eden Project and from one of them they managed to raise about fourteen thousand pounds. She says that it was amazing coming together of the music and ecologists and horticulturists. Pam says that they have gone on to do so many things with Eden, such as art projects and residencies and that they have just been the most wonderful partner.

(24.26) Pam talks about the Peace Park, saying that initially landmines were an issue and that she and Paul Guest, the Chair of Manchester Aid to Kosovo at the time (then working within Manchester Ambulance Service), had a major concern about safety. She says that one of the first things they had to do was working with the de-miners in Kosovo, mainly ex Army, who were regularly being called out to check out ordinance spotted all over Kosovo, including cluster bombs. She says that they came to the Peace Park and used all their GPS readings and tracked that there had never been anything found on the park, including dead animals which can be evidence of a triggered landmine, and they clearly stated that the land could be used to develop a Peace Park.

(25.37) Pam talks about then working with the Municipality to turn this much loved piece of woodland in Podujevë, north east Kosovo, in to a Peace Park. She says that before the war, it had been a place where children would go on special occasions annually, to play games, and it had been terribly messed up during the war. She that it was not a case of creating a brand new park but improving and claiming back this cherished land. They did a lot of work there with the children who were always hanging around and because they almost got in the way a little, one of the volunteers, who was a teacher, started doing work with them elsewhere which has turned into the Children's Programme.

She says that artists came to work with them which has developed into the Art Program, with probably twenty to thirty residencies in the UK and with UK based artists also going to Kosovo. Pam says that by now there have been around one hundred volunteers that have been involved in the Peace Park from the UK and an equal number from Kosovo. She says that it is important that the project is developed with team work.

Pam says that initially just Brits and the Kosovars that were evacuated to Manchester were involved but this has developed into more and more of the local people work with MaK. She says that the park will never be 'finished' but that it is looking amazing.

(27.30) Pam describes the Peace Park and its location. She says that it is on the

edge of the town, Podujevë, near the Serb border which is why she thinks it was so hit so badly in March 1999 and during the weeks following. Pam says that the municipality has a population of about 130,000 and that most probably live in Podujevë, in the town itself, but there are about 80 surrounding villages.

She describes it being on the edge of a railway station and that there was a train but sections of the track were hit by NATO during the war and it has not worked since. She says that Serb army were hiding in tunnels and there was a lot of fighting around the railway. She says it is next to all kinds of fascinating railway installations such as the station house and a pump where they would pump water into the trains from the reservoir - which is actually on the Peace Park.

Pam describes a third of the site being a flat field, a third woodland and then a flat summit which has a disused Serb Orthodox Church on it as there was a small population in the town. Pam says that there is now a beautiful garden which was planted in 2008 with thousands of trees, shrubs and roses. She says that inside the park there is a children's play area, the beginning of some sports facilities (which they want to put more money into), a trim trail for athletes, dense woodland and a summit with incredible views at the top of the park. She describes there being art in the garden itself, a life-size nude man sitting on a bench called 'Thinking Man' and other art and slowly we are developing it. She says that they are working on education as well as that particular sculpture was stolen for its metal value and although they have disasters, they keep going at it a step at a time to educate about public property and public art. She says that the community is really starting to recognise that this is a piece of land that they own and they can develop as a community which is what they want.

(30:37) Pam talks about Manchester Aid to Kosovo as an organisation. She says that it is an organisation which is involved in diverse projects. Pam says that nearly everyone involved in MaK is a volunteer and always have been. She says that the two paid staff are the gardeners on the Peace park in Kosovo and although they are a tiny charity, they are totally committed to paying their wages and trying to raise funds so that the Peace Park - for quite some years - will be controlled by MaK's paid staff who they train up and support.

Pam explains that Manchester Aid to Kosovo has volunteers from all walks of life. She comments on there being quite a lot of teachers involved as education has become more and more important in aiding recovery in Kosovo.

(31:37) She says that they have an IT project which came about as one of the Summer Club leaders, who was doing a PhD at Oxford, noticed that there were less than 100 computers for thousands of children and was keen to do something about that. She says that they have since created about 15 IT suites, in both primary and secondary schools, mainly in Podujevë. She says that they decided to try and make an impact on one area rather than spread themselves too thin. She talks about young people and students coming out to work on the park and in the Summer School and building teams working on the park.

(32.55) Pam talks about always being interested in new volunteers for Manchester Aid to Kosovo and how they want to more art projects, music projects and how they are keen to have more of an impact medically as a lot of help is needed there. She talks about being involved with a Psychiatric Day Centre - where they are creating a garden as well - introducing the idea of using the park there for therapy for their clients. Pam says that a lot of these ideas are fairly new in Kosovo so they take it one step at a time and that seems to be the way it works. She talks of Manchester Aid to Kosovo being 16 years in and built on relations in the UK, inside and outside the Kosovar community, and relationships in Kosovo.

(33:55) Pam talks about Manchester Aid to Kosovo changing her life, and now being a huge part of her life. She says that the day she took the black bags full of clothes and blankets to donate to the convoy, it changed her life, in a way totally, as it has affected her whole family. She tells of her mother in law, who died last year at age 96, being the person to pronounce Podujevë the best, as she was a linguist, and how she would talk about MaK and all the wonderful people she had met through MaK. It had affected her life, hugely. Pam suggests to just ask her kids and her husband.

She says that it has been very, very hard at times such as when they went to the prison in Belgrade and the children had to identify a prisoner. She say that she could not really express to anyone the sense of darkness and evil, really, especially when she was with a beautiful 13 year old girl who had been shot so badly, holding her hand, and she had to stand in the prison and this group of body builders came out. She describes this being through two way glass so they could not see the child and Pam , but she remembers that day feeling completely overwhelmed by someone kind of power, maybe spiritual, and how the man identified was smiling whereas all the other men, who she did not ID, were making themselves out to look very fierce. Pam says that she felt that there was something they had set up there amongst themselves, the prisoners.

Pam explains that when she says that it has changed her life, it is because she has listened to people's experiences, and the deaths of the children particularly are very hard to deal with even though she never met them – she considers they were just as lovely as the ones she knows, they were just the unlucky ones. Despite the sorrow Pam describes how it has all brought such richness to her life.

(36.40) Pam says that is has also puzzled her as of the three of the surviving children, three girls in the Bogujevci family were all born on the same day in different years: 12th June. Pam says that when they then went on to be awarded the Anne Frank Award for Moral Courage - because of what they did going to give evidence - they found out that they were also born on the same day as Anne Frank. Pam says that the Anne Frank Trust Director just couldn't speak.

She says that Kosovo was also liberated on the same day - June 12th - and

sometimes you start to see a pattern that you can't understand. She says that you start to question things such as why Saranda survived when she received about 15 bullet wounds. She says you just have to lay it to rest and say that it is bigger than you can understand. Pam says that the children are puzzled by certain things too but what is there to say?

She talks about Kosovo enriching her life. She feels that she got hardened emotionally quite early on through seeing things like children in hospital, in 2000, injured by landmines when playing football, and later going to Belgrade with the children giving evidence.

(39:00) Pam says that there is a side that she wishes no-one had to hear or know about as it's so bad that little children get blown to bits and little children get shot. For some reason she ended up doing this work and she doesn't really know why. Pam describes being involved in the music project as being a gift to her - as she loves music - and that it helps with the darkness. She says that she is still deeply involved in MaK's music.

(39:55) Pam gives information about the legalities of the Kosovar community and their arrival in the UK. She says that when people were brought to Kosovo in 1999, they hadn't chosen to come to the UK; they'd been in camps, often in Macedonia, just over the border, some in Albania, too. They were allocated to host countries all over the world. She says that if people had relatives, they could perhaps mention that and they might be linked with relatives who had already emigrated, and the evacuation was massive with people were going as far as Canada and Australia.

Pam says that Switzerland and Germany hosted the highest numbers of refugees. She says that the UK was part of this humanitarian plan because Kosovo had, in effect, been destroyed. Pam describes 50% of all the primary schools being damaged, about 60-70% of the housing stock classified as either gone, burnt or destroyed. She talks about there being no jobs, terrible roads and that medical services had collapsed.

She says that people were sometimes just given a few hours notice that they might be coming to the UK and that sometimes they didn't even know until they were on the plane where it might land. She describes the various places people might be sent to and how it made a massive impact on their lives.

Pam says that over 4,000 people were brought to the UK and well over half of these people were thought to have special needs. She describes that as meaning that they had young children, for instance, and that life would be difficult without a degree of support or it could be that they had a very serious illness. Pam says that there was an agreement that the hospital services and the social services would actually be more suitable in the north and it would be better to avoid the overcrowding of the South-East and London.

She says that Manchester, Leeds and Glasgow received the bulk of the Kosovar refugees where at least one member of the family needed particular support, often medical. She describes a warm reception and the facilities being in place, largely because of volunteers and voluntary organisations really rallied around. She says that places like disused schools had been converted with massive effort and that a lot of MaK aid which was collected in places like schools and churches included emergency resources distributed to people when they arrived and not only went to Kosovo. She says that included huge amounts of clothing and toiletries, and even wheel chairs that people were known to need.

(44:16) She says that it was quite quickly realised by the United Nations mission in Kosovo, that with the freezing winter and the state of collapse in the country that returning was not viable. She says that they actually sent out requests to all the host countries saying, 'Hold back, these people cannot be forced back quickly because, although there's a degree of peace and stability, there's nothing there.' Pam says that in England, this situation affected the planning, long term, and families were moved from temporary accommodation into their own houses. She says that in Germany and Switzerland, people were forced back very quickly and that although these countries had received very high number of refugees, they forced back thousands of people. Pam says that Germany forced back nearly 7,000 people in 2000 whereas the UK, which had just over 4,000 people who were evacuated and about 37 were known to go back that year. She suggests that some people wanted to go back and try to rebuild their lives but for many it was too soon.

She says that there was a policy for people to go and look and see how their home was and people were given free flights and invited to do that. Pam suggests that this was done too early and in the snow of 2000, people came back a bit shocked and shaken up.

(49:23) Pam says that in the Bogujevci family, there were five children who were receiving medical treatment and they were brought to Manchester because it was one of the best places to treat them for multiple gunshot wounds. Pam says that the surgeons were saying that they hadn't finished, that the treatment was not something that they could do in a year. Even so initially that particular family were given a refusal of asylum. She describes people not really choosing to come to UK in the first place but then being made to apply for asylum to stay.

Pam describes how, throughout the country, communities were getting behind individual families and children and fighting for them to stay. She says that, luckily, the government actually listened as people had fought quite hard. She describes how various doctors and surgeons, and all the people who had been involved in medical treatment, extremely skilled care, suggested that it would all come to nothing, if it was halted prematurely.

(53:03) She says that this resulted in a much more relaxed attitude to the evacuated Kosovars staying on in England. She says that people settled in

	<p>England and that's how some people are still here. Some people wanted to go back and some people still feel that Kosovo is their home. She says returning is continuing. One of the Manchester children who were evacuated recently decided work in Kosovo. Pam says that some people have now got British passports giving them much greater freedom to travel but she knows of people still waiting for legal documents. She concludes that there were few forcible returns and that people were welcomed to make Manchester their home.</p>
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